

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA CITY

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

PANCANAL

USCINCSO

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SUBJ: TRAVEL AND STATEMENTS OF FOREIGN MINISTER TACK

REF: USIS MEDIA REACTION APRIL 28 AND 29, 1975

SUMMARY. FOREIGN MINISTER TACK'S STATEMENTS CONCERNING THE CANAL ISSUE DURING AND AFTER HIS APRIL 24-26 TRIP TO BOGOTA AND CARACAS REFLECTED A MIXTURE OF MODERATION AND FIRMNESS. MODERATION APPEARED IN HIS EXPRESSION OF DESIRE TO AVOID A CONFRONTATION WITH THE U.S. AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF PROGRESS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS, SPECIFICALLY ON JURISDICTION AND ADMINISTRATION MATTERS. HE ALSO SAID THE U.S. EXECUTIVE UNDERSTANDS THE PANAMA ISSUE. FIRMNESS WAS EVIDENT IN STATEMENTS THAT THERE WOULD BE NO TREATY UNLESS IT BE ONE OF REASONABLY SHORT DURATION, ACCEPTABLE TO PANAMA AND THAT IT MIGHT TAKE YEARS TO AGREE UPON A TREATY. VISITS BY PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS TO ALL LATIN COUNTRIES ARE PLANNED AS PART OF PANAMA'S CAMPAIGN TO STRENGTHEN

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SUPPORT FOR ITS POSITION IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND ENSURE TOTAL

SOLIDARITY IN OPPOSITION TO THE U.S. SHOULD THE NEGOTIATIONS BREAK DOWN. PESSIMISM CONCERNING THE NEGOTIATIONS IS BEING EXPRESSED BY PANAMANIANS AND IS APPEARING IN THE PRESS. A LEADING COLUMNIST APRIL 29 TALKED OF THE GOP LAUNCHING "ALL OUT FIGHT" FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION AS RESULT OF IMPASSE IN NEGOTIATIONS (SEE MEDIA REACTION APRIL 29). FEATURE EDITORIAL IN EL PANAMA AMERICA APRIL 29, WHILE EMPHASIZING PANAMA WANTS TO AVOID CONFRONTATION LEAVES NO DOUBT THAT CHOICE OF ALTERNATIVES RESTS WITH U.S. END SUMMARY.

1. CLOSE ON HEELS OF HIS VISIT TO BRAZIL WITH VICE PRESIDENT SUCRE, FOREIGN MINISTER TACK VISITED BOGOTA AND CARACAS FOR HIGH LEVEL TALKS ON CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS, PANAMA'S BID FOR ELECTION TO SECOND TERM ON UNSC AND ITS PROPOSALS CONCERNING OAS. TACK WAS QUOTED IN PANAMANIAN PRESS THAT HIS TALKS WITH PRESIDENTS LOPEZ MICHELSSEN AND PEREZ AND THEIR FOREIGN MINISTERS HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN ACCOMPLISHING THEIR PURPOSES, I.E., ENSURING THAT THE DECLARATION OF PANAMA, SIGNED IN MARCH BY THE HEADS OF STATE OF VENEZUELA, COLOMBIA, COSTA RICA AND PANAMA, DID NOT REMAIN "AN ABSTRACT THING, A MERE THEORY" BUT A GUIDE TO ACTION. ACCORDING TO TACK, PLANS FOR THE MAY 8 OAS MEETING WERE DISCUSSED. WHETHER SOME SURPRISE INITIATIVE IS IN THE WORKS WE DO NOT KNOW. SOME OF TACK'S STATEMENTS IN BOGOTA, CARACAS, AND UPON HIS RETURN TO PANAMA CONCERNING THE NEGOTIATIONS RECEIVED PROMINENT TREATMENT IN PANAMA'S PRESS AND ARE WORTH OF NOTE. ONE QUOTE UNDERLINED PANAMA'S VIEW OF THE NEGOTIATIONS AS A TWO-STEP PROCESS: "FIRST THERE MUST BE A BILATERAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN PANAMA AND THE UNITED STATES (EXECUTIVE). SECOND, THAT TREATY MUST BE RATIFIED."

2. HEADLINES AND FEATURE ARTICLES IN THE GOP-CONTROLLED MATUTINO AND CRITICA CONCERNING STATEMENTS IN CARACAS FOCUSED ON THEME "PANAMA LOOKS FOR SOLUTION AND NOT CONFRONTATION WITH U.S." TACK WAS QUOTED AS SAYING PANAMA EXPECTS THAT THE U.S. WILL ADOPT A POSITION WHICH MAY BE ACCEPTABLE TO PANAMA. IT WAS NECESSARY, HE SAID, TO MAINTAIN AND FURTHER DEVELOP EXISITING SUPPORT FOR THE PANAMANIAN CAUSE IN ORDER TO FACE UP TO THE FACTIONS IN THE U.S. WHO OPPOSE NEGOTIATION OF A NEW TREATY. "WE WISH TO CREATE AN AWARENESS...THAT THIS IS CLEARLY A FORM OF COLONIALISM IN OUR CONTINENT WHICH IS NOT ONLY OF INTEREST TO PANAMA BUT TO CONFIDENTIAL

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ALL THE GOVERNMENTS AND PEOPLE OF LATIN AMERICA. WE EXPECT THAT THE ATTITUDE OF THE U.S. TOWARD THE CASE OF PANAMA WILL SHOW THE MEASURE OF SINCERITY WHICH THAT COUNTRY IS WILLING TO GIVE TO THE PROBLEM OF LATIN AMERICA."

3. THE STAR & HERALD APRIL 29 QUOTED TACK AS HAVING SAID IN BOGOTA THAT THERE HAVE BEEN MAJOR ADVANCES IN THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS, BUT THE TALKS MAY YET LAST MONTHS OR EVER YEARS MORE.

THE ADVANCES WERE IN MATTERS OF JURISDICTION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE CANAL. "WE ASPIRE ON THE FIRST POINT TO OBTAIN FULL SOVEREIGNTY OF THE ZONE WITHIN NORE MORE THAN 5 YEARS. AS TO ADMINISTRATION WE ARE SEEKING TO CONSTITUTE A NEW ENTITY DIFFERENT FROM THAT EXISTING AT PRESENT. WE NEED THE GROWING PARTICIPATION OF ALL PANAMANIANS AT ALL LEVELS AND IN ALL CATEGORIES. THE NORTH AMERICAN EXECUTIVE UNDERSTANDS THE SITUATION AND THE MATTER OF RESTITUTION OF PANAMA'S JURISDICTION OVER THE CANAL IS ALREADY AGREED UPON. IN FEBRUARY 1974 SECRETARY HENRY KISSINGER AND I SIGNED A PRELIMINARY AGREEMENT ON THIS ASPECT."

4. DURING AN AIRPORT INTERVIEW UPON HIS RETURN TO PANAMA APRIL 26, REPORTED IN GOP-CONTROLLED DAILIES EL PANAMA AMERICA AND THE PANAMA AMERICA, TACK, RESPONDING TO QUESTION CONCERNING STATEMENTS ATTRIBUTED TO PRESIDENT FORD THAT THE U.S. WOULD APPROVE A TREATY WHICH DEFENDS U.S. INTERESTS ON A LONG-TERM BASIS, SAID: "WE HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO DEFEND THE LEGITIMATE PANAMANIAN INTERESTS IN A TREATY OF REASONABLY SHORT DURATION, AND ACCEPTABLE TO PANAMA. WITHOUT THESE CONDITIONS THERE WILL NOT BE A TREATY." HE OUTLINED PLAN FOR VISITS TO ALL LATIN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES, INCLUDING CUBA, AFTER WHICH DISCUSSIONS WOULD BE HELD WITH MEXICAN LEADERS. IN ADDITION TO CONSULTING WITH GOVERNMENTS IN COUNTRIES TO BE VISITED, PANAMANIAN DELEGATION WOULD INFORM NON-GOVERNMENTAL "POPULAR ORGANIZATIONS" ABOUT PANAMA'S CAUSE.

5. CONCERNING PANAMA'S BID FOR ANOTHER TERM ON THE UNSC, THE STAR & HERALD QUOTED TACK AS SAYING PANAMA HAD RECEIVED PLEDGES OF VOTES FROM SIX LATIN AMERICAN NATIONS AND THAT RUSSIA AND THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA ALSO SUPPORT PANAMA'S BID TO A SEAT. HE REPORTEDLY ALSO SAID PANAMA WOULD SOON ESTABLISH RELAT-

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IONS WITH THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA.

6. COMMENT: TACK'S STATEMENST CONCERNING THE NEGOTIATIONS AND THE U.S. WERE MODERATE YET FIRM. HE RECOGNIZED THAT THE U.S. EXECUTIVE UNDERSTOOD THE PROBLEM AND ACKNOWLEDGED PROGRESS HAD BEEN ACHIEVED, BUT ALSO SHOWED AWARENESS THAT STRONG OPPOSITION TO A TREATY EXISTS IN THE U.S. HIS STATEMENTS THAT PANAMA WOULD ACCEPT ONLY A TREATY OF REASONABLY SHORT DURATION AND THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS MAY TAKE YEARS CAME ACROSS VERY FIRM AND WILL FURTHER DAMPEN OPTIMISM WHICH EXISTEBNIN PANAMA CONCERNING NEGOTIATIONS THROUGH MARCH, BUT WHICH HAD BEEN RECEDING DURING RECENT WEEKS. EVENTS INDUCING PESSIMISM INCLUDE PRESS REPORTS FROM WASHINGTON OF A HARDENING IN U.S. POSITION IN WAKE OF REVERSES IN VIETNAM AND ELSEWHERE, STATEMENST ISSUED BY SOME MEMBERS OF CODEL METCALFE'S PARTY IN OPPOSITION TO A TREATY, AND THE INTENSIVE

CAMPAIGN UNDERWAY AMONG CANAL ZONE RESIDENTS TO ORGANIZE OPPOSITION TO A TREATY. THEIR IMPACT, ADDED TO HOVERING SHADOW OF THE RESOLUTION SIGNED EARLIER BY 37 SENATORS, HAS HAD SOBERING EFFECT IN PANAMA. WHILE PANAMANIANS REMAIN FIRMLY COMMITTED TO COMPLETING THE NEGOTIATION, TOP OFFICIALS ARE ALSO PREPARING FOR A POSSIBLE STATEMENT OR BREAKDOWN IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. THEY ARE AWARE THAT THEY HAVE LITTLE GIVE LEFT IN THEIR POSITION AND NOW FEAR THAT PERHAPS U.S. MAY BE IN SAME SITUATION.

7. WE NOTE THAT PESSIMISM IS CREEPING INTO EDITORIAL COMMENTARY ON NEGOTIATIONS. RICARDO LINCE, IN APRIL 29 COLUMN IN CRITICA, SAW POTENTIAL IMPASSE IN NEGOTIATIONS AND SAID PANAMA HAS BEGUN TO IMPLEMENT AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY OF KIND NATIONS EMPLOY "IN ALL-OUT FIGHT FOR THEIR NATIONAL LIBERATION." THE FEATURE EDITORIAL IN GOP-CONTROLLED EL PANAMA AMERICA APRIL 29 IN DISCUSSING TACK'S TRIP HAD TITLE THEME "PANAMA DOES NOT SEEK CONFRONTATION WITH U.S." AND EMPHASIZED THAT PANAMA DOES NOT ASPIRE TO BECOME A SECOND VIETNAM BUT SIGNIFICANTLY LEFT THE CHOICE OF ALTERNATIVES TO THE U.S. WHILE PROGRAM OF VISITS TO ALL LATIN NATIONS HAD BEEN TALKED ABOUT FOR SOME TIME, WE SUSPECT THAT THE SOBERING EVENTS OF PAST FEW WEEKS ACCOUNT FOR THE INTENSITY WITH WHICH THE VISITS HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED.

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